



**Rhode Island Department of Health**

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[www.health.ri.gov](http://www.health.ri.gov)

**Interim Health Advisory**

Date: August 12, 2009

To: Pediatricians, Family Physicians, Urgent Care Centers

From: Director of Health, David R. Gifford, MD, MPH

Re: Information on Surveillance of H1N1 (Swine) Influenza in RI

**Frequently Asked Questions About H1N1 (Swine) Flu**

**What is the current status of H1N1 (swine) flu in RI?**

As of August 12, there are 200 confirmed positive cases in RI. Rhode Island and national surveillance data indicate increased infections in children, increased infections in individuals with chronic medical conditions, and a generally higher hospitalization rate of those infected. Although most illness in Rhode Island has been mild, compared to seasonal influenza, there is an increase in the number of hospitalizations.

**Are there any best practices for triaging high call volume in the office?**

- Determine if patient has influenza-like illness (ILI). Symptoms of ILI include fever plus cough or fever plus sore throat.
- HEALTH recommends that for mild ILI, patients with no underlying medical conditions do not need to seek medical attention and do not need to be tested.
- Use clinical judgment to reserve treatment for ILI for moderate to severe cases. See CDC's treatment guidance at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/recommendations.htm>

**Who should be treated?**

- HEALTH recommends that for mild ILI, patients with no underlying medical conditions do not need to seek medical attention and do not need to be tested.
- Use clinical judgment to reserve treatment for ILI for moderate to severe cases. See CDC's treatment guidance at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/recommendations.htm>
- Do not refer patients to go directly to the Emergency Room without consulting your office first to determine severity of illness.
- Pay special attention to patients at risk of complications of influenza. (These include anyone with chronic heart or lung conditions, anyone with diabetes, anyone who is immunocompromised, any woman who is pregnant or any patient with special healthcare needs.) For detailed information, visit <http://www.health.ri.gov/pandemicflu/swineflu/Advisory/DevelopmentalDisabilitiesGuidance060809.pdf>
- Patients with ILI should stay home until they are free of fever for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicine.

**How long will this last?**

- HEALTH expects that the response to H1N1 (swine) flu will likely last throughout the fall and winter. All healthcare practices should develop and/or implement standard office policies and procedures to handle continued surge in patient visits.

- HEALTH encourages all healthcare facilities to implement infection control guidelines where appropriate. For details on infection control, visit <http://www.health.ri.gov/pandemicflu/ProviderAdvisory/050109advisory.pdf>

#### **What should I be telling my staff and my patients?**

- Staff should remember to use personal protective equipment when appropriate. For guidance on use of masks and N-95s, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/makss.htm>.
- Everyone (staff and patients) should be reminded to
  - Wash hands frequently with soap and warm water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand gel.
  - Cough and sneeze into elbows.
  - Stay home if you are sick.

#### **Where can I go for more information?**

- HEALTH's Information Line – 401-222-8022
- HEALTH's website – <http://www.health.ri.gov> (information updated regularly)
- HEALTH used information provided by individual healthcare practitioners in the L2K licensing system to create the distribution list. To update your contact information, complete and return the change of address form at <http://www.health.ri.gov/hsr/professions/changeaddress.pdf>